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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: NAZARBAYEV PLAYS AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE THIRD  
CONGRESS OF LEADERS OF WORLD AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

REF: ASTANA 1131

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (U) SUMMARY: Kazakhstan hosted the third triennial Congress of World and Traditional Religions in Astana July 1-2. More than 70 delegations with 400 participants representing Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and other religious confessions participated in the event. They discussed the role of religious leaders in building peace through tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation. Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev made remarks at both the opening and closing ceremonies. He called on religious leaders to set up a "new global order" to resolve various problems, and praised President Obama for seeking to enhance mutual understanding. In his remarks to the Congress, Israeli President Shimon Peres urged Arab leaders to join Israel in peace negotiations; the Iranian delegation walked out during Peres's speech. Israel's Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Yona Metzger and Egypt's Minister of Religious Endowments (Awqaf) Mahmoud Hamdy Zakzouk condemned the use of violence. Representative Eni Faleomavaega (D-American Samoa) attended the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions on July 2 (reftel). END SUMMARY.

NAZARBAYEV PRAISES OBAMA'S CAIRO SPEECH...

13. (U) In his remarks to the Congress, Nazarbayev called on religious leaders to be conduits for setting up a "new global order," saying "a new global order can be created not after a global armed conflict, as it used to be in the past, but in a peaceful way." He applauded recent initiatives from heads of leading "eastern" and "western" countries, specifically President Obama's Cairo speech, saying, "We are inspired by the new U.S. leadership's desire to reach mutual understanding with the Muslim world and it may be viewed as a sign of important changes in the world." He added, "Kazakhstan also supports the proposal of the Saudi Arabian king to establish a dialogue of cultures and traditions." Nazarbayev suggested that the Secretariat of the Congress and Kazakhstan's International Center of Cultures and Religions establish a council of religious leaders to cooperate with other similar world forums. Nazarbayev also called on religious leaders

to deal with problems of lack of food security, prevalence of disease, and insufficient cultural understanding, as well as to find new ways to counter terrorism and drugs and to create a non nuclear world. Nazarbayev referred to Kazakhstan's renunciation of nuclear weapons and legacy of leadership in non-proliferation, and called on the international community to create a new international nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) since "the current NPT is not able to prevent the existence of nuclear weapons."

#### ...AND KAZAKHSTAN AS AN EXAMPLE OF INTERCONFESSIONAL ACCORD

¶4. (U) Nazarbayev emphasized that Kazakhstan's experience in preserving interconfessional accord had "proved to be one of the most successful in the post-Soviet space," with 3,200 mosques, temples, and churches co-existing peacefully on Kazakhstan's territory. Nazarbayev announced that on the eve of the Congress, he had personally laid the cornerstone for the construction of a new mosque in Astana which is expected to house 5,000 worshippers and thus be the largest mosque in Central Asia. Construction of a large Orthodox Church will be completed next year, Nazarbayev added. He argued that his government's establishment of an International Center for Cultures and Religions and a Fund for Islamic Culture and Education, as well as his government's call for the United Nations to declare 2010 a "Year of Rapprochement of Cultures," gave Kazakhstan "full credibility" to preside as chairman of the OSCE in 2010 and of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 2011.

#### PERES CALLS FOR NEGOTIATIONS FOR PEACE WITH ARAB LEADERS

¶5. (U) In his remarks to the Congress, Israeli President Shimon Peres urged the leaders of Arab countries to join Israel in

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negotiations for peace in the Middle East. "Here, from this rostrum, I am addressing Saudi Arabian King Abdullah with a call to gather in Jerusalem, Riyadh or maybe to come to Kazakhstan or another country, and together with other Arab leaders we will be able to discuss your vision," Peres said. Describing an Israeli project to develop enriched wheat, Peres said enriched wheat is better than enriched uranium, and it is better feed people than threaten them. "We must separate religion from terror; the God of killers is not the God of believers," declared Peres, adding, "We must hold and encourage peace initiatives."

#### IRANIAN DELEGATION WALKS OUT ON PERES

¶6. (U) Iranian representatives walked out during Peres' keynote address. "We have come to listen to religious leaders," Iranian delegation member Mehdi Mostafavi told reporters, "and Peres is not a religious leader." (COMMENT: According to media reports, Peres was not originally scheduled to attend the conference, but since he was in Kazakhstan on a state visit at the time, he received an invitation. END COMMENT.) During the Iranian delegation's departure from the central hall of the Palace of Peace and Harmony, one of Mostafavi's aides reportedly told reporters, "Israel won't attack us; we're not afraid of Israel or the United States." Speaking of Peres, Mostafavi's aide said, "(Peres) is a stealer of lands and a conqueror, and we're not willing to hear him. Peres represents an abominable Zionist personality, and his place is not here."

#### ISRAELI, EGYPTIAN REPRESENTATIVES DENOUNCE TERROR AND VIOLENCE

¶7. (U) Israel's Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi, Yona Metzger, also called for peace among nations in his opening remarks. He praised Kazakhstan for being a place where people of different faiths live in peace and harmony. He specifically thanked Nazarbayev for his role in organizing the Congress, saying "you are the one leader who calls everyone and everyone comes." Metzger held up a picture of abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and appealed to all the religious leaders to pressure Hamas to allow a "person of faith" to visit the soldier. Metzger said it was impossible to hold talks with Hezbollah or Hamas "because they have a quite different language of negotiation; it is a language of terror." He called on all religious leaders "not to use houses of prayer as instigators of terror."

Mahmoud Hamdy Zakzouk, Egypt's Minister of Religious Endowments (Awqaf), also declared that "no religion can call for violence." Zakzouk used a vivid analogy, saying that if all of humankind is sharing a boat, we cannot make a hole in it, or we will all drown.

#### LUTHERAN REPRESENTATIVE URGES MOVEMENT FROM WORDS TO ACTIONS

¶8. (U) Reverend Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, also applauded President Obama's outreach to the Muslim world through his Cairo speech, and expressed hope that religious leaders will imitate his approach and reach out to one another. The real test of the "Astana Agenda," Noko declared, is "when the Third World Congress of Religions will make a difference in people's lives, and when religious leaders will move from speeches to actions." Chief Mufti of Kazakhstan Absattar Derbisali, Grand Imam and Sheikh of Cairo's Al-Azhar Mosque Muhammed Sayyed Tantawi, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, Vice President of the World Federation of Buddhists Hamba Lama Choyzhilzhavyn Dambazhav, and Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva Sergei Ordzhonikidze made the remaining opening speeches.

#### NAZARBAYEV MEETS ONE-ON-ONE WITH SEVERAL WORLD LEADERS

¶9. (U) President Nazarbayev met with many world religious leaders and guests of honor on the margins of the Congress. Media reporting highlighted the following meetings:

- Director-General of the United Nations (UN) Office at Geneva Sergei Ordzhonikidze told Nazarbayev that the UN "supports this very

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important initiative, which is necessary for the international community and is aimed at improving relations between people, religions and states."

- Secretary General of the Saudi Arabia-based World Muslim League Abdullah bin Abdul Mohsin Al-Turki thanked Nazarbayev for his invitation to take part in the Congress, passed on greetings from Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, and expressed his intention to open a World Muslim League regional office in Kazakhstan next year.

- Turkey's Minister of Work and Social Security Faruk Celik discussed further cooperation between Kazakhstan and Turkey on behalf of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan.

- Former Norwegian Prime Minister and current head of the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights Kjell Magne Bondevik said, "We are expecting a lot from Kazakhstan's OSCE presidency and have the same positions on non-proliferation."

#### PARTICIPANTS DESCRIBE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

¶10. (U) The Congress concluded with an elaborate outdoor ceremony featuring a short concert of traditional Kazakh and Western music, a closing address by President Nazarbayev, and children releasing doves. Nazarbayev noted that a dramatic increase in the number of delegations over the previous congress -- from 17 to over 70 -- showed the forum's increase of authority. He said the discussions at the Congress showed that all the spiritual leaders who gathered in Astana had shown their readiness for dialogue. Reiterating his opening remarks, Nazarbayev emphasized that "spiritual beginnings must rank as one of the most important mechanisms for the reconstruction of the post-crisis world." Nazarbayev reminded the participants that the Congress had taken place during a holy month in the Islamic calendar, and therefore that the decisions made by the participants would be "blessed."

¶11. (SBU) PolOff met with several participants during the Congress, all of whom expressed gratitude to Kazakhstan and President Nazarbayev for holding the Congress.

- Representing a newly opened synagogue in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Rabbi Torenheim praised Kazakhstan for its tolerance, and said he has not felt his community to be the target of any anti-Semitism, and applauded President Nazarbayev for holding the congress.

- The Chairman of UNESCO's Executive Board, Olabiyi Babalola Joseph Yai, said the Congress was much improved over the previous one held in Astana in 2006, particularly because the number of delegations had increased dramatically. Yai expressed hope the next Congress will be even more inclusive, especially in representation from female delegates and traditional religions. "There were practically no women here at all, which is very disappointing," declared Yai noted that "aside from Shinto, almost no representatives from traditional religions participated."

- Paul Pieper, a representative of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, said not all delegates were as receptive to inter-religious dialogue during working-group sessions as opening speeches encouraged. Nevertheless, Pieper told PolOff that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was pleased to have participated in the congress for the first time, and he hoped it would be invited to the next congress.

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